

COUNCIL OF NORTHERN CAVING CLUBS

Important safety information about using CNCC descriptions and rigging topos

This MUST be read and understood by anyone using a CNCC-provided cave description or rigging topo

These descriptions and rigging topos are provided by the CNCC for use by experienced cavers only in assisting with trip planning and route-finding on some of the popular sporting routes in our region. They are not exhaustive, they do not cover every passage or feature, and details may have been greatly simplified to try to keep them concise and clear.

Great efforts have been made to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the information. Nonetheless, there are likely to be errors and (over time) an increasing number of inaccuracies due to changes in the caves and the replacement of resin anchors. The descriptions may also contain subjective viewpoints which could be open to misinterpretation. It is entirely incumbent upon all cavers to exercise appropriate care and caution when going underground using these topos and descriptions, and to have researched the trip from several other sources. Never make any safety critical decisions based on the information in these descriptions or topos.

Pull through trips must only ever be undertaken by cavers who are confident in finding the lower route out of the cave without a description, and who understand the extra precautions demanded of such trips (e.g. carrying multiple ropes).

The rope lengths stated in the rigging topos are considered the minimum length required based on average rigging. There may be errors, or your rigging may use more rope than anticipated. Therefore, it is critical that all ropes that are deployed for use have two tightened knots in both ends, to mitigate against the risks associated with the ropes not reaching the bottom of pitches.

Difficulty ratings, or 'grades' have been omitted from these descriptions. All cavers must make their own informed judgements of whether the cave is suitable for their capabilities, backed up by thorough research into the nature of the cave from numerous sources and an understanding of the capabilities of others in your group.

Many in-site ropes and ladders are mentioned throughout the descriptions. These should only ever be considered navigational markers and not safety critical belays. The CNCC does not install or maintain any fixed aids in caves other than the resin anchors shown on the topos. Never trust your safety to a rope or ladder which is left in a cave. For resin anchors you must understand the importance of belaying your rope to multiple anchors, including full traverse ropes leading to pitches, and always performing a pre-use inspection on every anchor. If any resin anchor shows movement, or fracturing in the nearby rock, it must not be used.

Rigging must always be performed to avoid any rub points or other hazards. Rigging exactly as depicted in the rigging topos does not guarantee a rub-free descent; this must be assessed and ensured by each individual caver on each pitch in every cave.

Many caves which are susceptible to danger from flooding have been highlighted in the descriptions. However, all caves, even typically dry ones, can flood in various circumstances, and it is therefore critical that the experienced caver using these descriptions makes their own judgement based on experience, extensive research and weather forecasts. Decisions to descend any cave after or during wet weather, or when wet weather is forecast, should be made based on an informed judgement backed up by thorough research from multiple sources. The critical moto which should be adhered to is "If in doubt, stay out!"

Although warnings are provided where there are some specific known hazards, the absence of a warning does not indicate that there are no hazards. Caves can (and do) change over time. Furthermore, the CNCC does not perform routine inspections or surveys of caves to look for specific hazards (e.g. loose rocks). All cavers are strongly advised to view the webpage on the CNCC website for their chosen cave to check for any warnings that have come to our attention. Experienced cavers using these descriptions must make their own evaluations for hazards throughout the duration of their trip and act appropriately to mitigate any risks.

Neither the author of the descriptions/topos or the CNCC will accept any responsibility for any damage, injury or loss (however caused) resulting from the use, misuse or misinterpretation of information in these cave descriptions or rigging topos.



Caving in Scotland

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Despite sizable exposures of limestone across Scotland, cave systems the magnitude of northern England have yet to be found. Nonetheless, there are some splendid caves up to 2-3 km long, with many offering excellent sporting adventures, as well as geologically unique karst environments which should prove fascinating to experienced cavers.

Accommodation for cavers visiting the north-western limestone exposures (Durness, Assynt and Knockan) regions can be found at the Grampian Speleological Group hut in Elphin, 20 km north on the A835 from Ullapool. This magnificent area is a paradise to all outdoor enthusiasts.

Much as we have done for many northern England caves, we are now pleased to bring you these descriptions for some of the most popular trips in Scotland, divided by area. These have been written specifically for the CNCC, with many thanks indeed to Alan Jeffreys.

More caves will be added to this guide in due course, so always ensure you download the most recent version before heading off on your adventures.

Background photo; Watershoot, Uamh an Claonaite (Gary Douthwaite)

Section 1:

Durness

Smoo Cave

NC 419 671 Alt. 2m

Smoo Cave is one of Scotland's rare show caves, well signposted from Durness village. A path down a steep slope at the head of Geodha Smoo leads directly to the huge entrance. At very high tides sea water may prevent access.

Navigation:

Cross the shallow stream issuing from the cave and follow a well-trodden path into the main chamber (33m wide and 48m deep). At the rear is a massive stalagmite run with a tiny streamlet issuing from beneath. This is currently being dug, as shakeholes on the plateau above suggest a continuation.

The main stream flows out of a high 'doorway' on the right – now approached using a wooden walkway installed by Highland Regional Council.

Beyond lies the Second Chamber, a flooded cavern with holes in the roof, from the largest of which flows the entire Allt Smoo to create a spectacular waterfall. Most of the lake here is over two metres deep, although it is possible to cross on the right in shallower territory. A boat is provided for guided tours and this crosses to a continuing passage directly opposite the point of entry, under a flake and into a passage of comfortable dimensions leading, after 30m, to an aven and vertical sump pool.

A wooden bridge spans the Allt Smoo above the Second Chamber waterfall, providing an excellent take-off for a 20m abseil into the lake. Very narrow ledges below water level allow a traverse around most of the lake, but some swimming is inevitable.

Permission:

Theoretically, access to the cave is unrestricted, but during the tourist season it is only polite to engage with the cave guide, Colin Coventry, in order not to interfere with tourist trips.

Section 2:

Traligill Valley, Assynt, Sutherland

Cnoc nan Uamh System ['Hill of Caves' System]

NC 2762 2059 Alt. 221m

Also known informally as 'Cnockers'. In very wet weather, the First Stream Chamber carries a strong flow which can be treacherous. Access will be sumped in extreme conditions.

Use the public carpark below the Inchnadamph Hotel on the A837 at NC 251 217.

Note: There is no automatic right of vehicle access up the track to Glenbain cottage. Prior permission for that is required from the Estate.

Follow the public track up-valley for 1.5 km to a hillock lying in front of a prominent hill. The cave has three entrances. The path passes the open entrance to Uamh an Uisge (the 'Waterslide') and a little distance further to the left lies the open entrance to Uamh an Tartair (Cave of Roaring). Between them, a short climb upslope leads to an open pothole (not named) of 20m, also accessible from Uamh an Uisge.



Photo: Uamh an Tartair, Cnoc nan Uamh, Dry Entrance (Alan Jeffreys)

Navigation:

Using the dry entrance of Uamh an Tartair, a crawl on the right leads to the First Stream Chamber.

To reach the Waterslide follow an aqueous narrow passage downstream. This leads to a series of deep potholes and daylight. Traverse across the foot of the daylight pitch to enter the Waterslide (also accessible from its surface opening). Great care should be taken crossing down the river, which in high water will be impassable. Then a largely dry route to the left leads down a huge thrust plane. Re-joining the stream at depth, a series of wet chutes ends at a horizontal crawl to the main sump.

Back at First Stream Chamber, cross the water to a beach of boulders (upstream the cave soon sumps), and climb the slope to a low eyehole on the left. Follow passages upstream to Landslip Chamber, formed in a widened thrust plane, and possessing a large, deep sump pool at its foot. At the far end of the chamber, an obvious continuation leads to walking passage and a long mud slope down to a static sump. An alternative route back – the Short Circuit – is accessed via an eyehole climb at the beginning of walking sized passage through a series of crawls and short climbs to exit near the top of Landslip Chamber.

Permission:

All the Traligill caves are on SSSIs and come under the control of Scottish Natural Heritage. Normally there is no problem with straightforward caving trips *except* during the deer stalking season. Check with the keeper at Stronchrubie Cottage at NC249192, late summer and autumn.

Lower Traligill Cave

NC 27067 20875 Alt. 168m

In wet conditions, water issues from what is normally a stream swallow and the cave should be avoided.

Use the public carpark below the Inchnadamph Hotel on the A837 at NC251217.

Note: There is no automatic right of vehicle access up the track to Glenbain cottage. Prior permission for that is required from the Estate.

Follow public track up-valley until a small wooden bridge over the Traligill River. Walk downstream to a prominent corner, where a limestone cliff at the left-hand corner houses Lower Traligill Cave, formed on the thrust plane.

Navigation:

The whole system is housed in an inclined bedding plane on the Moine Thrust, and in extremely dry conditions a low route may be followed for 50m to a sump. In normal conditions it is better to follow the path of least resistance slightly higher up, where some pleasantly decorated chambers may be seen. After 60m, a sharp right turn descends to a sump carrying the water from Cnoc nan Uamh.

Permission:

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Allt a'Chalda Mor Stream Cave ['Stream of the Big Hazel Stream Cave'] NC 254 235 Alt. 152m

This isolated little cave is located on the Achmore plateau north of Inchnadamph and, despite extensive outcrops of dolomite in the area, is the only sizeable system to be found there.

Park at a public car park near the remains of Ardvreck Castle on the A837.

Leave the A837 opposite the ruined Ardvreck Castle following the Allt a'Chalda Mor, crossing a marshy area at the top of the rise and bearing right with the stream to a prominent white limestone cliff. The cave entrance lies beneath an obvious waterfall to the left-hand side of this cliff, with piles of breakdown. Some simple clearance may be needed to gain entry.

Navigation:

A choice of entry points (drier to the west, much wetter below the waterfall!) open into a low, wide thrust plane passage with a quartzite roof. The stream roars down over a boulder-covered floor inclined at 30°.

Approximately 30m down there is a 2m drop, below which the stream occupies a distinct incised channel. For the next 22m the water takes several right-angled turns as the roof lowers. Crawling is necessary to progress downwards. As the stream trends left, the bedding may be pursued for an indeterminate distance until it becomes too tight.

Permission:

Access is generally unrestricted, but it is always good practice to check with the keeper at Stronchrubie Cottage (NC249192) late summer and autumn.

Glenbain Hole

NC 26500 21690 Alt. 161m

Use the public carpark below the Inchnadamph Hotel on the A837 at NC251217.

Note: There is no automatic right of vehicle access up the track to Glenbain cottage. Prior permission for that is required from the Estate.

The driveable track past the Inchnadamph Hotel ends at Glenbain Cottage. Just beyond the cottage on the left is a grassy stream gully. Climb up this until a respectable sinkhole is encountered, with an entrance under a small cliff. This will normally be taking water.

Navigation:

An obvious passage over fallen boulders ends at a small chamber some 20m in. The floor of this chamber was opened by blasting and digging and may re-choke after floods. Passing an awkward climb down and a squeeze, a streamway may be entered where a crawl leads to No-Name Chamber and then opens into a wide thrust plane descent similar to the Waterslide in Cnoc nan Uamh. After 60m this ends in a choked sump.

Permission:

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St George's Cave [Uamh nan Naomh Seoras]

NC 3119 2608 Alt. 355m

Flood debris suggests that in wet weather the entire cave floods to the roof.

This stream cave lies in an isolated outcrop of dolomite to the south of the Stack of Glencoul in a very remote location. It may be reached by an arduous (>15km) walk from Inchnadamph, or a 9km walk from Corrickinloch. However, this cave can also be approached by boat and then on foot from Kylesku (~3.5 hours each way).

Approach by boat:

A slipway in Kylesku allows for launch of a canoe/kayak. Note that the loch is tidal and planning to paddle with the tide (paddling outwards at/just after low tide and paddling back between 6-11 hours later before the next low tide) is recommended. The loch can become dangerously choppy for canoes and kayaks in windy weather. After roughly a one hour (5 km) spectacular paddle down Lock Glencoul (going right at the major fork of two lochs), Glencoul mountain bothy will be seen on the left embankment before the loch narrows. Land here and follow a vague path that follows Glencoul River south east for 4 km to reach Loch an Eircill. At the end of this loch, head south for 1.2 km to a narrow limestone ridge. The cave is found at the southern end, amongst a group of tiny caves, 1.2 km north of the north-western shore of Gorm Loch Mor. A sizeable stream sinks in a small depression where a 1m climb over boulders leads into the cave.

Navigation:

From the entrance climb, access is gained to a walking sized stream passage. 50m of fine, clean-washed streamway leads over small cascades to the Chocolate Teapot, a 3m overhanging pothole requiring a handline. Here a roomy chamber receives two inlets from the west. Water now enters a low wide thrust plane and 30m of hands and knees crawling leads past a couple of inlets to a tight duck and a low canal which in low water can be pursued for some distance to a small sump.

Permission:

This cave lies in a remote and isolated highland moor and access is unrestricted. However, during the stalking season it may be advisable to check with the keeper at Stronchrubie Cottage (NC249192).

Uamh na Doineann (Storm Cave)

NC 28147 19611 Alt. 270m

The easiest route of approach is to follow the Traligill public path to Cnoc nan Uamh, then contour south round the hillside using a footpath which runs to a shallow gorge above the open mouth of Uamh Cailliche Peireag. When the open moor is reached, head south east until a (usually) dry river bed is encountered. Follow this 'upstream' to a well-defined river sinkpoint [Cuil Dubh]. Storm Cave lies 120m north along the flood overflow channel from this sink.

Navigation:

The entrance comprises a deep trough with rocky sides, formed by collapse under flood pressure. Note that frequent major overflows from Cuil Dubh have engineered considerable alterations to this entrance, which may therefore be more or less easy to navigate than the description below.

A drop of 3m onto clean-washed limestone blocks gives access to a stooping crawl which opens after 8m into a large chamber, made sombre by massive deposits of black peat mud. By negotiating the steep mud bank (best tackled to the left), a descent of some 10m leads to an active inlet and a clean-washed streamway which drops a further 60m to a deep sump pool.

There are various inlets in the system, none of which extends very far, the best being the active inlet half way up the mud slope. Here 20m of stooping passage lead to a pool and a blind, too-tight tunnel beyond.

Permission:

All the Traligill caves are on SSSIs and come under the control of Scottish Natural Heritage. Normally there is no problem with straightforward caving trips *except* during the deer stalking season. Check with the keeper at Stronchrubie Cottage at NC249192, late summer and autumn.

Tree Hole

NC 2695 2097 Alt. 174m

Warning: in wet conditions both upstream and downstream sections of the cave become impassable.

The cave is located in the south bank of the usually dry bed of Allt a'Bhealaich some distance downstream along the prominent thrust plane from Lower Traligill Cave. The entrance is clearly marked by a well-established tree in the low cliff face.

Navigation:

Massive boulders surround the entrance which involves a 3m climb down into a small breakdown chamber. Upstream, 30m of low going leads to two parallel crawls, the right hand one closing at a sump.

To the left, a crawl passes through Water Torture, a 10m long wet crawl which turns left and up to Swift Half Series, a series of small chambers and awkward squeezes ending at a dig. Roots and earth on the left throughout the Swift Half Series indicate close connections to the surface.

Downstream from the entrance chamber, descend through jammed rocks to access the stream, which flows into a flat-out crawl of some 5m (sumped in wet conditions), opening into a sizeable chamber with a cascade entering from the left. At the chamber's end, a very tight slot in the water leads to Twat's Temple, a boulder-choked widening with a sump closing downstream progress.

Both ends of Tree Hole lie within 45-50m of other, smaller, caves formed within the thrust plane.

Permission:

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Section 3:

Allt nan Uamh Valley, Assynt, Sutherland

General information on all Allt nan Uamh Valley caves:

Parking: There is a well-maintained public carpark at the foot of the valley, in front of an abandoned fish farm, at NC 253 179. An information board has been installed by Scottish Natural Heritage which includes narrative on the caves, particularly the Bone Caves which lie along the south edge of the valley.

Permission: All the Allt nan Uamh caves are on SSSIs and come under the control of Scottish Natural Heritage. Normally there is no problem with straightforward caving trips *except* during the deer stalking season. Check with the keeper at Stronchrubie Cottage at NC249192, late summer and autumn.

Allt nan Uamh Stream Cave

NC 27461 17119 Alt. 320m

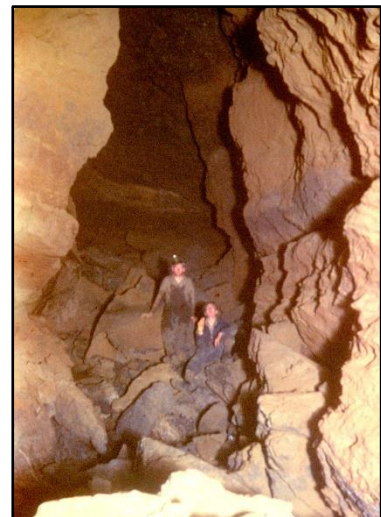
The entrance lies close to surface stream level. Although a dam has been constructed outside, in very wet weather water may flow down the constricted entrance.

A maintained path follows the floor of the valley eastwards for about 30 minutes to a point below Breabag, where a prominent fork in the glen leads northeast and south. Take the northeast-bound (left-hand) path until a run of boulder rubble leads back down to the active stream. The entrance lies in a triangular alcove on the left-hand side some 75m downstream of a waterfall at the head of the ravine.

Navigation:

The whole cave is comprised of a network of joint-controlled phreatic passages, yielding a number of internal round trips.

The entrance comprises a twisting downward tube which opens into The Assembly Hall, a walking sized tunnel which soon descends to a complex junction at Piccadilly, where it is possible to climb down into an active vadose series called Rift Stream Series.



Continuing straight on from Piccadilly, a scramble up a mud slope leads to Oxford Street, with pleasant walking until it turns sharp right to a boulder slope opening into Breakdown Chamber. A small excavated crawl at the rear of the chamber may be followed, with an unpleasant near-duck in wet conditions, to Sotanito Passage, where easy going for over 200m, including two short left-hand traverses over deep pits, ends with a gentle descent to an active streamway, issuing from the upstream Sump 4. By backtracking along this streamway, Thunderghast Falls will be found (bypassed by an easy climb) leading to the upstream end of Sump 3.

Back at Piccadilly (in the 'old' cave), an easy earthy traverse on the left passes beside The First Stream Chamber to enter a complex of old phreatic tunnels which give access to The Pit (where sump 1 exits) and Second Stream Chamber where the water is lost. A static sump to the right, drained by using a self-starting siphon, leads to a flat-out crawl into more spacious going, before deteriorating into a selection of muddy crawls, all currently blocked.

Photo: Piccadilly, Allt nan Uamh Stream Cave (Trevor Ford)

Uamh an Claonaite ['Cave of the Sloping Rock']

NC27095 16563 Alt. 343m

The original entrance to Scotland's longest cave system has been engineered through an unstable boulder choke. Great care should be taken to avoid putting undue stress on individual boulders. In wet weather, several points in the cave sump, or become impossible due to powerful water flow.

A maintained path follows the floor of the valley eastwards for about 30 minutes to a point below Breabag, where a prominent fork in the glen leads northeast and south. Turn right (south) up a marshy stream valley at the end of the Creag nan Uamh cliff until the path reaches open moorland. An indistinct trail continues for 150m to a large depression in which a sagging limestone cliff marks the cave entrance.

Navigation:

After a climb into a small chamber, a tight descent through the boulder choke opens into an active streamway quickly gaining height before dropping abruptly down a 4m wet pitch which can be avoided by an exposed step and traverse. In wetter conditions this can be a dramatic spot!

A large sloping chamber with the stream on the right leads to a sharp right turn into a pool where a left turn opens into a rocky continuation of the passage and a shallow descent to Sump 1. This can be bypassed on the left by means of a short, low and gloomy wet crawl; full wetting is inevitable. **This sumps in wet conditions!**

Thereafter, a rock slope and a dry chamber lead back to the main river passage which is followed downstream via a number of short climbs into Cavity Wall Passage, a picturesque vadose rift formed between two distinct types of limestone extending for some 90m before descending two thrust plane 'Watershoots', connected by a deep pool.

Sump 2 is encountered at the foot of the second Watershoot, but an obvious climb up on the right allows progress along a gritty hands and knees crawl into more spacious, boulder filled passage which eventually descends to Sump 3 (*not* free diveable). Near the top of the final slope is an opening to The East Block, a rock-strewn mud crawl which leads to a series of large dry caverns with a final 100m of interesting passage (Infinite Improbability Inlet) ending at a massive mud choke.



Photo: Entrance to Uamh an Claonaite (Gary Douthwaite)

Rana Hole

NC 26895 16768 Alt. 365m

Black Rift pitch may become impassable in wet conditions.

Follow the Allt nan Uamh public footpath, crossing the riverbed half way up the glen and ascending steeply up a path on the right towards the cliff face. Follow the cliff face along a path, passing the Bone Caves. At the end of the cliff face, continue right around the corner and an ascending footpath leads to the top of the plateau. A semi-grassed spoil heap marks the position of Rana Hole.

Rigging: See topo overleaf. The fixed ladders and stemples are not CNCC-approved; a belay is essential.

Navigation:

The excavated entrance shaft is fitted with fixed ladders **except for the first 4m** (short ladder needed). Alternatively, it can be descended by single rope using anchors at the surface for descent of 16m landing on a large ledge. The second pitch is then accessed utilising metal stemples on the left wall to reach a second ladder for a further 12m drop and a 3m climb down to the foot of the shaft. Here a wet grovel opens into a narrow rift which gains width at a boulder pile, where holes in the floor drop into the top of Two A's Chamber.

Descend to level ground and cross to the far wall where a narrow eyehole drops into further easy passage trending left to enter Black Rift Chamber where a pitch falls away down a narrow rift. In wet conditions, several streams unite to pour down this shaft which may become extremely unpleasant or impassable. The first 8-10m are free climbable, but the bottom 6m require tackle. The pitch can either be laddered or abseiled, the latter method well provided for with anchors for a 23m rope using several re-belay. At the foot, a duck under a rock ceiling directly below the pitch opens into a spacious rift, best traversed over flakes to reach a climb up cemented boulders, an eyehole and a slippery descent on the far side connecting with Belh Aven in Uamh an Claonaite 7 (see overleaf).

From the foot of Black Rift Pitch, an alternative route on the left leads into the Tony Jarratt Series, where traversing leads to a series of crawls and wider spaces culminating in Two B's Chamber, the most extreme southerly part of the system.

Uamh an Claonaite 7 via Rana Hole:

Previously only accessible to cave divers, Claonaite 7 can now be entered via Rana Hole into Belh Aven, a 25m high rift with a stream trickle falling from the roof. Turning right from the point of entry leads to The Palatial Abode of Edward Concretehead, a large, ancient boulder-strewn passage trending eastwards towards the downstream end of Sump 3. Two engineered routes now provide access to the streamway from that sump, giving dry bypasses to sumps 4 and 5.



Some 5m upstream from Belh Aven lies the exit pool of Sump 6b, the original way into Claonaite 7 (Sump 6a is a static overflow pool at the end of the old stream passage). Above the sump pool various muddy crawls lead off to digs and oxbows.

Turning left in Belh Aven, an easy sandy crawl is the high level of a wide, sloping passage (Portobello Promenade) at the foot of which the stream flows along a section called Memories of Tangalle. The crawl bends to enter the start of Legless Highway, running more or less straight toward the Creag nan Uamh cliff. An obvious large walking passage on the left at the start of Legless Highway enlarges as it opens into a huge chamber, The Great Northern Time Machine, where, at the left-hand side, a massive descent of dry mud and sand unites with the active stream to fall over a 5m pitch – free climbable with care – into a pleasant vadose canyon terminating at sump 7.

Photo: The Great Northern Time Machine, Uamh an Claonaite (Mark Lonnen)

Rana Hole, Assynt - NC 26895 16768

Entrance Shaft

RH01 to RH11 are eco-anchors also known as P-hangers

Equipment required

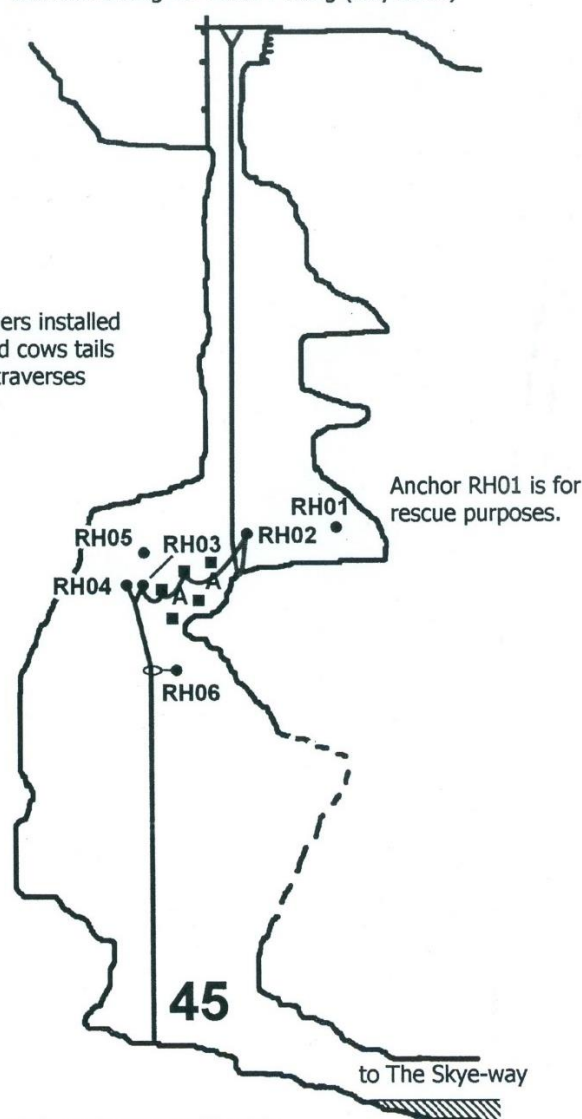
Rope	45 m
Short slings	3
Screw gate karabiners/MR	7
Snap gate karabiners	1

At present (July 2009) the entrance shaft has fixed rigid ladders installed and you can descend with no additional tackle. A harness and cows tails are recommended for protection on the descent and on the traverses between ladders.

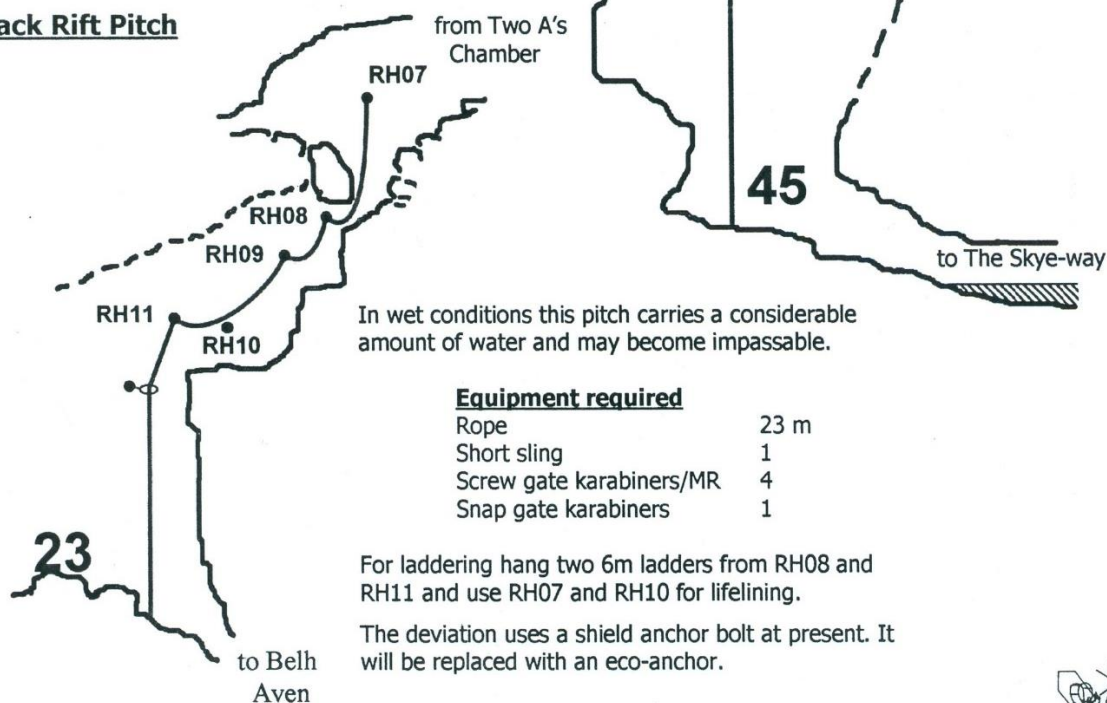
To protect the traverse the rope can be rebelayed to the 12mm stainless steel U-bolts 'A'

Anchor RH05 on the opposite wall of the shaft is for rescue purposes.

Use scaffolding for initial Y-hang (July 2009)



Black Rift Pitch



Equipment required

Rope	23 m
Short sling	1
Screw gate karabiners/MR	4
Snap gate karabiners	1

For laddering hang two 6m ladders from RH08 and RH11 and use RH07 and RH10 for lifelining.

The deviation uses a shield anchor bolt at present. It will be replaced with an eco-anchor.



Section 4:

Knockan Plateau

General information on all Knockan Plateau caves:

Permission: Access to the Knockan area caves is usually unrestricted, but it is always good practice to check with the keeper at Stronchrubie Cottage in the stalking season, late summer to autumn.

Uamh Poll Eoghainn ['Cave of Owen's Pool']

NC 20669 09306 Alt. 263m

Best approached by leaving the A835 at a prominent bend at the south end of Knockan Hamlet and walking straight over the col west of Cnoc a'Choillich Beag. Descend the gentle slope beyond down to an obvious river bed at the foot of the valley. A small outcrop of limestone with a low cliff will be seen at a noticeable corner. The stream sinks into the cave at this cliff, although in dry conditions it will be lost further upstream.

Navigation:

The entrance is a small, square hole floored with cobbles. After an awkward thrutch forward for 2m the floor begins to drop away down a steep ramp to open abruptly into a small chamber with very loose debris to the right.

Straight ahead an opening at the back wall leads to an easy climb down a vertical rocky fissure divided by a large ledge half way. About 8m down a narrow passage may be followed to the left (north) down three steps to a small sump pool.



Photo: Entrance, Uamh Pol Eoghainn (Alan Jeffreys)

Turning left at the foot of the entrance chamber (following the water), a low wet crawl for 2m leads to a broken 7m pitch which in wet conditions may be impassable (ladder recommended). 3m down the pitch, the floor begins to slope steeply to also end at the sump pool.

Elphin Hole

NC 20874 09322 Alt. 253m

Approach to the cave is the same as that for Uamh Poll Eoghainn. When the river valley is reached, climb 20m up the slope opposite that cave and walk a short distance northwards until a boat-shaped depression with a bank on its west side is found. A small (possibly overgrown) oval hole in the floor marks the entrance.

Navigation:

Photo: Entrance, Elphin Hole (Alan Jeffreys)

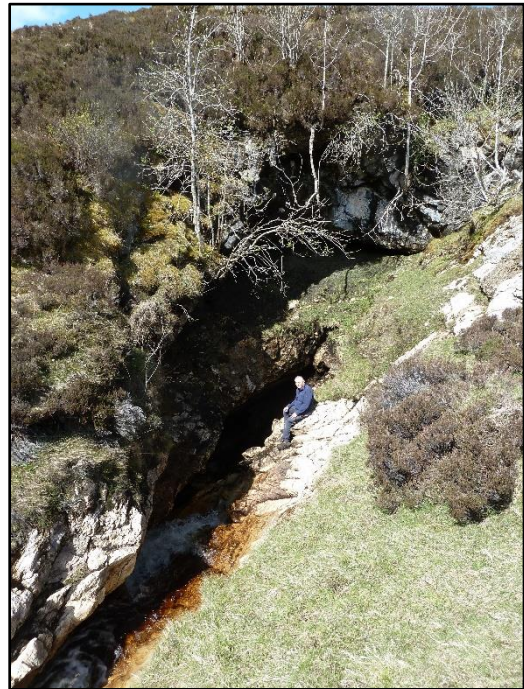


An 8m climb down through friable and rotten limestone ends where a stream issues out of a choke. Following the water downstream a slope of rubble opens into a fine rift passage. After 50m, jammed boulders dictate a squirm up at roof level where a climb down once again meets spacious passage. This passage then veers to the left – there are high level oxbows in the roof – and descends to a sump pool.

Uamh an Tartair ['Cave of Roaring']

NC 21665 09132 Alt. 262m

Follow track from the east side of Knockan hamlet until the stream bed of the Abhainn a'Chnocain is reached. Walk up to the skyline via the west side of this river, passing a huge doline on-route. When level ground is reached, a large vertical shaft, Uamh Mhor [Big Cave], will be seen. It is 20m deep and is better accessed by walking down to the stream valley to the left where in normal conditions water races down a thrust plane below an angled cliff. This is the entrance to Uamh an Tartair.



Above: Entrance, Uamh an Tartair, Knockan

Left: Climb out of Uamh an Tartair, Knockan

Photos: Alan Jeffreys

Navigation:

Passing through 10m of comfortable stream passage, water flows away to the left and is normally sumped. Straight ahead is a low, uncomfortable rocky crawl opening into the foot of Uamh Mhor. Having regained the stream, follow it across the shaft floor into a narrow vertical fissure which is penetrated for 75m, with some scrambling over or under wedged boulders.

At the end of the fissure, there is a 5m pitch. A long belay back upstream is required for a short ladder climb. At the foot, easy going rapidly descends into a thrust plane where, in dry conditions, it may be possible to slide down 10m to a small sump pool. **After continual rainfall, the cave will be sumped to the top of the pitch and may be impassable even further up the fissure.**

Section 5:

Argyll

Note that most Appin caves lie within forestry plantations. New access roads for tree felling tend to appear, and fresh planting may obscure many cave entrances.

Uamh nan Claig-ionn ('Cave of the Skulls')

NM 98203 51388 Alt. 215m

Leave the A828 (going south from Ballachulish) via a forestry track at Dalnatrat along Glen Salachan, taking the right fork when encountered. Parking is available on grass turf just before a forestry gate. Well maintained tracks continue, but may not always be available for vehicles. Walk up the track beyond the gate, taking the left bend to a wide cleared section below a hill slope to the left. The main entrance to Claig-ionn lies part way up this slope, with a path to it.

Rigging topo: Uamh nan Claig-ionn is fitted with CNCC-approved resin anchors. See rigging topo overleaf.

Navigation:

Note: in wet conditions the entrance stream may be diverted into a channel a few metres further up the hill.

An open pothole, sometimes taking water from the hill above drops 3m to a vadose gully which rapidly diminishes to a flat-out rock crawl.

After 6m a drop on the left continues under the crawl above and declines rapidly to a 5m pitch. If laddered, belay to flakes in the floor; if abseiled, there are anchors in the roof for a free hang. Below, a free climbable 3m drop leads into the main streamway.

Upstream (right) is a crawl, hands and knees to flat out in places, which exits at another open pothole, Uamh an Mnathan Uasal an Duror, but this entrance is usually blocked with flood debris.

Downstream, the passage rapidly expands to reach a respectable chamber, some 20m high and 11m deep from the floor at point of entry. This vertical pitch can be laddered using either a prominent flake on the right to avoid the full force of the water, or anchors are installed for SRT.

At the base, a vertical fissure leads off, passing beneath a jammed pile of phyllite blocks to arrive at the next pitch, Dealer's Drop, 6m, also supplied with anchors. At the foot, a circular pool drains into another fissure, Chest Pot, tight at the top but quickly widening to provide a comfortable 9m drop.

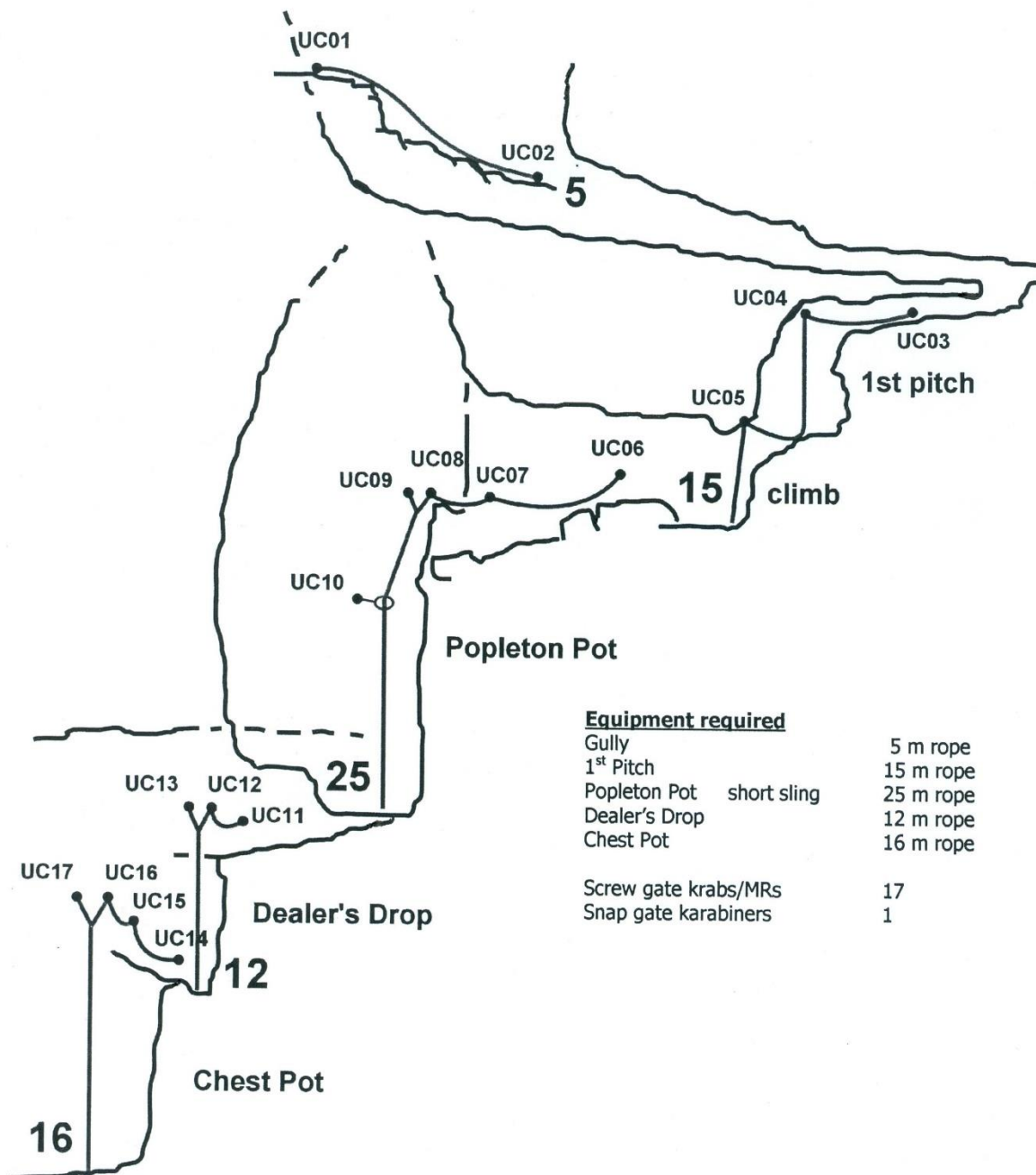
Crossing the flat floor of this 'final' chamber, follow the water into a flat-out crawl on the left (which may be choked with cobbles) to gain a stooping vadose passage 10m long ending abruptly at sump 1.

Permission:

It is the policy of the Forestry Commission to provide open access for sporting activities in its forests, and no prior permission is required for sport caving.

Uamh nan Claig-ionn, Appin - NM 98203 51388

(Cave of the Skulls)



Poll Seomar ('Chamber Pot')

NN 03040 49836 Alt 300m

Drive up the north side of Glen Creran on the A828 and continue on the B road to Elleric, where there is a public car park. Take footpath past the schoolhouse and follow until the Allt Coire Sheileach is encountered. Climb up beside the river to the tree line, cross the river and contour east to a group of deciduous trees 15m into what is usually a conifer forest. The entrance lies at the foot of a shallow depression running downhill at the edge of the limestone. [Note: a similar, blocked, entrance point lies a few metres further east, but it will be obvious that no access can be gained at this point].

Navigation:

There are two holes, the higher taking water. The lower hole is easiest where a steep scramble down boulders through a spiralling crawl opens into a sizeable chamber where the stream is lost. By climbing over a massive breakdown feature opposite the point of entry a steep ramp is accessed, descending to a twisting stream passage ending at a sump.

From the first chamber, a collection of inlets and further chambers culminate to the west in a set of avens rising to the blocked entrance noted above.

Permission:

It is the policy of the Forestry Commission to provide open access for sporting activities in its forests, and no prior permission is required for sport caving.

Uamh a'Chromaichag ('Owl Hole')

NN 035 512 Alt. 610m

Drive up the north side of Glen Creran on the A828 and continue on the B-road to Elleric, where there is a public carpark. Take footpath past the schoolhouse and follow the Allt Coire Mulrooney for 2km up the flank of Coire Dubh. A group of caves lies at the tree line, with three, Owl Hole, Main Stream Cave and Primrose Hole forming a coherent single drainage route. Owl Hole is the most northerly and longest of the three, with an entrance in a depression where a stream falls down a waterfall to enter the cave.

Note: *afforestation may render route finding complicated.*

Navigation:

Upstream within the entrance a short passage in a bedding plane chokes after 8m. Downstream a horizontal streamway ends at a 4m drop into a narrow rift, which may also be pushed upstream for a short distance. Downstream, follow the regained stream in a diminishing sized tunnel for some 45m down a ramp where, after passing an inlet stream, the route becomes too tight.

The way on is to the right at the top of the Ramp along a dry rift passage which descends steeply. 26m along a very sharp elbow bend turns to the right at a junction to enter a confusing section of tight vertical fissures which eventually lower to 1m in height. A small exit to the surface was excavated at this point.

12m back from this exit some 'round trips' can be achieved in awkward overlying passages.

Permission:

It is the policy of the Forestry Commission to provide open access for sporting activities in its forests, and no prior permission is required for sport caving.

Uamh Coire Sheileach ('Willow Pool Cave')

NN 0298 4960 Alt. 350m

Drive up the north side of Glen Creran on the A828 and continue on the B-road to Elleric, where there is a public carpark. Take footpath past the schoolhouse and follow until the Allt Coire Sheileach is encountered. Climb up beside the river to two waterfalls. Above is a birch wood on the left (west) side of the river. The small entrance lies about 10m from the river bank in a small hole beside a tree stump.

Navigation:

A circular rock crawl opens into a spacious vadose passage. After 20m the roof lowers and the First Inclined Rift Cave is met. This is a wide rift inclined at 30° with some vadose development at the foot and a small stream. Beyond, a 2m trench degenerates into a series of small, muddy crawls, with an alternative route overhead leading back to the Inclined Rift cave. The crawls become too tight at a point where daylight can be discerned through a choke.

Permission:

It is the policy of the Forestry Commission to provide open access for sporting activities in its forests, and no prior permission is required for sport caving.

Draught Caledonian

NN 0126 5546 Alt. 322m

Leave the A828 at the village of Duror and drive round the houses to Auchindarroch [Achadh nan Darach] to a forestry gate which is usually locked. A branch track to the right just before it is usually open and it is possible to drive up some confusing forestry tracks to the foot of the cave-bearing valley.

Drive along the lower track for about a mile to a junction just before a bridge and a clearing, turn sharp left and drive uphill for a few hundred metres to join a higher track. Turn right onto this and follow it as it circles round to head back to the west. After a short descent it reaches a concrete bridge with a wider area suitable for parking.

A steep climb uphill on the east side of the river meets the resurging stream issuing from a low rockface crawl.

Note: *afforestation may render route finding complicated.*

Navigation:

A steep climb uphill on the east side of the river meets the resurging stream issuing from a low rockface crawl.

A flat-out wet crawl for a body length quickly heightens into an attractive, narrow, vadose canyon which offers a choice of sporting routes at varying levels for 115m, with several short upward climbs and eventually a choice of high or low levels routes to the terminal chamber.

At the terminal chamber, water issues from a small overhead sump *and* an impenetrable floor level passage. A high-level crawl straight ahead continues for 12m to where it bifurcates into impossible holes. The choked sinkpoint on the surface lies close to this point. Overall, a very enjoyable, sporting trip.

Permission:

It is the policy of the Forestry Commission to provide open access for sporting activities in its forests, and no prior permission is required for sport caving.

Uamh na Duilean Briste [Disappointment Cave]

NM 982 519 Alt. 126m

Leave the A828 (going south from Ballachulish) via a forestry track at Dalnatrat along Glen Salachan, taking the right fork when encountered. Parking is available on grass turf just before a forestry gate.

From this parking place, descend the steep slope on the left to the Ease nan Richagan river, cross and ascend the opposite bank (take care in high water). The entrance to the cave lies at a similar altitude to the car park and roughly opposite. A narrow slippery path leads to a body-height cleft in the limestone.

Navigation:

The passage commences at walking height and almost immediately turns sharp right into a narrow vadose canyon leading, after some 25m, to a vertical climb of about 5m. A makeshift tree trunk ladder clutters this climb. Beyond, the rift continues in clean, scalloped rock liberally endowed with sharp edges and solutional features. Small pools lie in the floor but usually there is little or no flowing water in the cave.

After a further 20m the passage divides. To the left a 6m climb leads into a joint 6m long which pinches out. To the right, a short climb and traverse crosses the lower passage to meet a 3m aven. At the top a flat-out bedding plane extends for an indeterminate distance, becoming far too tight for progress.

Permission:

The cave lies on farmland belonging to nearby Bealach Farm, but access is unrestricted.

Uamh an Tobair Dhuibh [Black Well Cave]

NM 983 515 Alt. 161m

Leave the A828 (going south from Ballachulish) via a forestry track at Dalnatrat along Glen Salachan, taking the right fork when encountered. Parking is available on grass turf just before a forestry gate.

Pass through the gate, following the track as for Uamh nan Claig-ionn. At a point where the track takes a long left hand (north east) bend, walk down the slope on the left. The cave, which is the resurgence for Uamh nan Claig-ionn, will be found as a spacious entrance in the grass slope.

Navigation:

The initial solutional passage is effectively divided into two levels. It is possible to grovel along the floor with the stream, but a much easier route lies to the left for 5m to reunite. The next 10m metres are best traversed until a small chamber is reached, with a tiny inlet from a roof aven. The floor consists of a flooded pot with the main stream issuing therefrom. This has been dived vertically down for some 5m to a tight silted passage.

Permission:

It is the policy of the Forestry Commission to provide open access for sporting activities in its forests, and no prior permission is required for sport caving.

Section 6:

Ayrshire

Cleaves Cove, Dalry

NS 3175 4745 Alt. 140m

Photo: Main Passage, Cleaves Cove (Alan Jeffreys)



This unusual minor maze cave overlooks the Dusk Water south east of the town of Dalry in Ayrshire. It is best approached by leaving the A737 just before Dalry to drive along the B707. At the second crossroads turn right and proceed for 2km to a T-junction. Turn left, and almost immediately right up a small road to Cockenzie. About 200m up this road a small stile on the right just past a house marks the path to the cave. Parking is sparse, and in wet weather the verges will be very soft.

Navigation:

Follow the path virtually straight down to the river. The cave has several entrances in a cliff face overlooking the river, the first being the most obvious, at the foot of a slippery mud slope.

A shallow descent opens into a tightly joint controlled system comprising some 150m of mostly clean walking passage leading off to the right and ending in a massive collapse where a former exit has collapsed.

Route finding is obvious, and the only concession to actual caving is a parallel crawl at the rear of the cave, accessed via a short climb from a chamber at the west end, leading to a muddy complex back near Entrance 1. Although easy going, this is an interesting little system, possibly partially eroded by the surface river, and which also possesses an archaeological history.

Permission:

There is no requirement for permission to explore the cave, but it might be circumspect to consult local residents about parking.

Section 7:

Peeblesshire

Jeanie Barrie's Cave

NT 153 554 Alt. 290m

This curious anomaly lies at the foot of the east side of the Pentland Hills near the village of Carlops on the A702. It may be approached either by driving up the tarmac road to Carlopshill Farm, parking at a grassy siding half way up and walking due south along the valley floor, or by parking (with permission) at the Icelandic Pony Stable a short distance beyond the village and walking straight down into the valley behind, past some holiday chalets. The entrance lies right at the foot of the opposite (north) side of the valley.

Navigation:

The cave is formed in a soft red sandstone conglomerate with a calcite matrix and was mistakenly classified as an ancient monument by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

Note: *The actual site for 16th Century silver mining lies close to, but is no part of, the natural cave.*

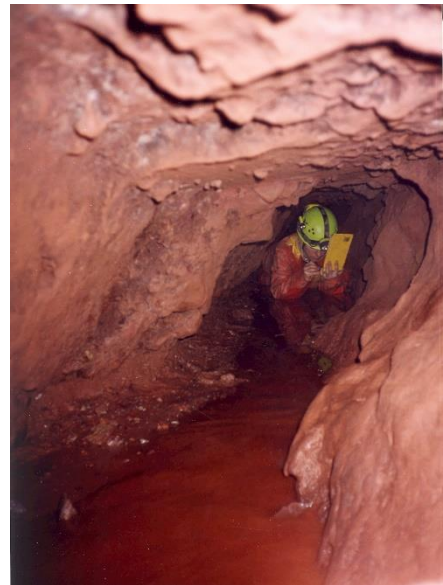
An inverted triangular entrance with a small stream issuing, develops into a canal, in places over knee deep, which extends for some 30m to a gravel beach. Beyond, an eyehole has been removed to provide access to a restricted, flat-out crawl along a tilted passage for a further 30m until the way on turns sharp right at a small pool. Here a rising crawl on the left ascends a tight, awkward section for 3m before dropping steeply away on the right to a low arch.

Beyond, a mud-filled, initially quite spacious passage leads past impossibly tight parallel routes for another 20m to encounter a rock flake and a tight Z-bend on the left into what used to be a tiny chamber (now reduced by dig spoil). An eyehole at the foot of this widening extends for 6m to a complete blockage. Prolonged visits to the far end will experience a build up of carbon dioxide, due to poor air circulation.

Permission:

The cave lies on land used by Carlopshill Farm, but no prior permission is required for recreational caving.

Photo: *First Crawl, Jeanie Barrie's Cave (Roger Galloway)*



Section 8:

Applecross, Ross and Cromarty

Poll Breugair (Liar's Sink)

NG 7177 4379 Alt. 138m

In wet weather, Uamh an Tuil will be completely waterlogged and Poll Breugair will be sumped after the entrance crawl.

Leave the hamlet of Applecross via a green track heading due south from a right-angle bend in the tarmac road. After half a kilometre the Allt Breugaireachd will be found. Some 30m upstream, duck under a swinging deer fence across the river bed and climb the watercourse for a further 30m until a prominent sinkpoint below a rocky step [this is Uamh an Tuil (Flood Sink, NG 71774 43786)]. The entrance to Poll Breugair lies a couple of metres downstream in the right-hand bank, comprising an excavated boulder pile. Take care that, with the deer fence erected on both sides of the river, this has allowed dense undergrowth to flourish, making walking treacherous.

Navigation:

Dropping down the boulder pile, an intricate series of cavities will be found. Follow the obvious route, a low crawl improving to hands and knees height over some 50m, until walking sized passage is encountered with a stream flowing along it. To the right it swiftly disappears into a muddy boulder choke (care: loose rockfall), but to the left continues in fine style with many formations, especially straws which force the explorer to stay low in the water. An awkward inlet on the left (Skull Inlet) leads to tight crawls which open into larger territory immediately below the entrance of Uamh an Tuil, creating a short exchange trip, entrance to entrance.

The main route turns sharply left to enter an area of large breakdown, with high level exceedingly well decorated grottos. Scrambling over the boulders, easy walking passage for 40m suddenly opens into Canada Cavern, a spacious hall 30m in length and about 15m in height. A massive pile of crumbling rock and earth forms a bridge at the far end, beyond which water falls down a vertical wall seamed with shale bands.

Artificial aids allow an easy climb to the summit of the bridge, where a bolt traverse (not CNCC approved therefore separate belay essential, harness and cowstails required due to paucity of footholds) on the left-hand wall leads to Shale Highway, 60m of easy going to further breakdown. A tight crawl through breakdown leads to a nasty duck, which is usually sumped in normal conditions. Beyond, 87m of passage end in a large sandy chamber, 'The Sanctuary', choked at the far end.

Permission:

Access to the caves of Allt Breugaireachd is currently unrestricted.